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Memorials of Brookfield.

A POEM,

DELIVERED AT

WEST BROOKFIELD, MASS.

OCTOBER 16, 1867,

THE

One Hundred and Fiftieth Anniversary

OF THE

CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH.

By Rev. FRANCIS HORTON,

OF BARRINGTON, R. I.

SPRINGFIELD, MASS.:
SAMUEL BOWLES & COMPANY, PRINTERS.
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Poem.

MEMORIALS OF BROOKFIELD,

BY REV. FRANCIS HORTON, OF BARRINGTON, R. I.

ANALYSIS. — Invocation and Gratulation — Scenery and Associations — Scenery still, and Cultivation, and Children — The Village, with its Walks, its Sanctuary and Sabbaths — Moral and Industrial Habits of Society — Favorable and Beautiful Surroundings — Former Residents and Local Attachments — Historic Reflections, Education, etc. — Religious Usages — Excellence of Domestic Character and Training — Worthy Ancestors and Ministers — Success of the Present Pastor — Historic Incidents, Revivals, and their Influence, especially the Last — Afflictions, Various and Personal — Fraternal Greetings — Anticipations, and Prayer for Posterity.

God of eternity, whose power
  Preserves us, and our fathers blest,
Be with us at this hallowed hour,
  And let us in Thy presence rest.
Here would we come with praise and prayer,
  Thy gracious goodness to confess,
Whose favor children's children share,
  In trust Thou wilt our offspring bless.
As pilgrims to a holy shrine,
  We gather joyously to greet
Each other, as in olden time,
  Thrice happy thus once more to meet.

A festival is this of years,
A jubilee of grateful kind,
Where minglings of smiles and tears
Refresh the heaven-aspiring mind.
No vain regrets or glooms we bring,
No sad remembrances of strife,
But rather one glad offering
To Him who is our spirit's life.
His may we be, a blessed band
Of brotherhood by heavenly birth,
All journeying to the better land
Whose paradise is not of earth.

Still cherish we this favored scene
Of toils, and friendships, griefs, and joys,
Though brighter visions intervene,
Of bliss that hath no dark alloys.
Fond memories of the past we trace,
'Mid plains, and hills, and sculptured stones,
And trees that with their grandeur grace
These sacred sites, and dear old homes.
Yon river, gentle as of yore,
Glides peacefully towards the sea,
Repeating fondly o'er and o'er
Sweet strains of Nature's minstrelsy.
Nor less the birds that flit above,
Or skim the surface of that stream,
In warbling tones of truth and love,
Gladden the meadows fresh and green.
Yon lakelet in its beauty lies
As when our fathers dwelt around—
A molten mirror of the skies—
How clear, how tranquil, how profound!

Look thither, at the twilight hour,
The sunset or the moonlight scene,
And feel the pacifying power
Alluring to the world unseen.
There gaze upon the vault of night,
Whence stars look down on shadows here,
Discoursing of those realms of light
That canopy our dusky sphere.
What wondrous influences blend,
To bless the soul on heaven intent;
And pilgrims on the earth befriend
With sweet provisions for content.

Each hillside sloping towards the plain,
Has sightly homesteads nestling there,
With garden spots, and fields of grain,
And ripened fruits, all fresh and fair;
And chubby children issuing thence,
In quest of berries or of flowers,
Blest samples of fair innocence,
Enjoy the glad autumnal hours.
Goodness! what glories flood the fields,
Where lawns, and groves, and orchards lie,
And every acre somehow yields
Its affluence 'neath the sunny sky!
Whose is the heart that does not rise
In gratitude to God above,
Whose favor and whose grace supplies
Such proofs of His paternal love?

Then look again—the village green
Smiles cheerfully the church around,
While numerous shops and dwellings seen,

Say thrift, and skill, and taste abound.
The shaded walks across the plain,
Broad avenues beside, well trod,
Are traveled not alone for gain—
All leading to the house of God.
Thither assemblies oft convene,
For praise, and preaching, and for prayer,
Where generations past have been,
In search of heavenly guidance there.
Glad voices greet the day of rest;
Hearts weary with their worldly care,
Or sorrow-stricken and distressed,
To Zion's altars here repair.
The Comforter, the Paraclete,
Whose office is to heal the soul,
Thus meets men at the mercy-seat,
Willing and waiting to make whole.
O what a balm the Sabbath brings,
To spirits seeking fresh supplies
Of holy influence at these springs,
Whose source is found in Paradise!

The week day world is tranquil here—
Of riot and of ranting void;
Nor child nor matron need e'er fear
With violence to be annoyed;
Save such excess as sin and crime
May bring to any spot of earth,
Where baser passions in their time
Incontinently spring to birth.
What industries are well supplied;
What habits savoring of health;
Not nursing indolence, or pride,

Yet nourishing the common wealth !
No ministries to public vice,
Destructive of the social weal,
Or schemes of crushing avarice,
The doings of the day reveal.
Thus labor hath its recompense,
Work of the lusty brawn or brain,
And all have healthful competence,
The landlord, and the humblest swain.

Extend the view, on either side,
Which trade or travel may incline,
And see the prospect opening wide,
No artist's pencil can define;
The hills ascend—their summits climb—
And gaze around where'er you stand;
Observe what elements combine
To beautify and bless the land!
Each sunny slope, and graceful swell,
Each pasture, with its lowing herd,
Each rivulet, and mossy well,
Salutes you with a welcome word:
"Pause, pilgrim, and enjoy the sight;
Communion hold with Nature here,
Drink in the fullness of delight,
Which dignifies this earthly sphere;
Nor deem it strange that those who trod
These paths aforetime, in their prime,
Held cönverse with Almighty God,
'Mid flush of scenery so smblime!"

Yet where are they—the stalwart men—
That traversed thus these hills and plains?

Whose like we ne'er may see again,
  Save as posterity remains;
And worthy women, meek in mein,
  Of aspect and of movement bland,
What wives and mothers then were seen,
  The joy and glory of the land!
Daughters of Brookfield, ever fair;
  With health and energy endowed,
Domestic jewelry most rare,
  Of which the dwelling may be proud.
Sisters and sons, with grateful sires,
  The labors of the homestead share,
While neither to the fame aspires
  Of uselessness or ennui there.
All love the country — well they may;
  Its atmosphere, its trees, its fields,
The summer and the spring so gay,
  And golden fruits that autumn yields.
Here winter hath its hearty joys,
  With books, and friends, and music blest,
While each his industry employs
  To render happy all the rest.

Thrice fifty years their course have run,
  Eventful in their various date,
Since godly fathers here begun
  The history we commemorate.
Scarce had fierce savages retired
  From streams and grounds they loved so well,
When friendly spirits prompt aspired
  In Christian fellowship to dwell.
No respite to their toils and cares,
  Would those heroic men afford,

Nor ceasing from their alms and prayers,
  Unitedly to serve the Lord—
Till place was found for worship free,
  Amid these pleasant vales and woods;
Provision for society,
  Instead of wastes and solitudes.
Honor to those who sought to lay
  Foundations for religion pure,
And to posterity convey
  A heritage of good so sure.

Their culture of the mind, no less
  Than ground that needed earnest toil,
To rescue from the wilderness,
  And render it a fruitful soil,
Secured at once most constant care,
  And steady exercise of skill,
The harvest wealth of soul to share,
  Which was their wisdom and their will.
Thus, near the church the school-house rose,
  However humble, still at hand;
As with religion learning goes,
  Enriching liberally the land.
E'en then what sportive games were seen,
  When children sprightly, fresh, and fair,
Tripped gaily o'er the village green,
  With guileless face, and flowing hair.
The spelling-book was not forgot,
  Nor Testament perchance, though rare,
As issued from their humble cot
  The little groups so free from care,
To meet the Mistress of the day,
  Whose smile was sure, whose word was rule,

Who favored knowledge more than play,
Within her well-taught, simple school.
True, John was roguish now and then,
And James too restless to sit still,
And Mary missed her page or pen,
[Now obsolete the gray goose-quill.]
Some stolen glances, too, were paid—
Ever, of course, against the rule—
From loving youth to blushing maid,
The merest accident at school;
Still study was the main pursuit,
Good learning and good manners taught,
"The young idea how to shoot,"
Was foremost in the teacher's thought.
Slight rivalries perhaps arise,
As pupils on success intent
The head to keep, and win the prize,
Nor suffer social detriment.
These have their stimulus, to aid
The indolent in quest of lore,
Inspiring those of various grade,
To lessons never learned before.
Fond intimacies ere long grow
To richer ripeness in the heart,
Till schoolmates are constrained to show
Reluctance evermore to part.
These signify their several choice,
In tokens never meaningless,
Each causing other to rejoice
In wedlock sure their lives to bless.
The nuptials finally are sealed,
With fitting rites and general glee,
And friendly feelings are revealed

In generous hospitality.
Thus families arise and spread—
Society its ranks extends—
Though fond ones drop among the dead,
The fairest and the best of friends!

Yet other strains our theme requires:
Time runs too rapidly to waste;
And we are following our sires,
In paths no more to be retraced.
They had their Sabbaths, blessed days,
And sermons from the wise and good,
Sweet seasons oft of prayer and praise,
When worldlings dared not intrude.
So had they sacraments of grace,
Such as their children still sustain,
The sacred font, in time and place,
Serving the covenant the same;
Symbol of cleansing and of cure,
Pure water sprinkled on the brow,
Doth all of simple form insure,
Availing to the service now.
Christ's table spread with bread and wine,
Choice elements, expressive still,
Perpetuates the feast divine
Of those who seek to do his will.
What numbers here have followed him,
Obedient to his blest command,
Whose spirits pure have entered in,
And joined the bright celestial band.
There dwell they with the sainted host,
Whose song on earth was wont to rise
To Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,
Jehovah great, above the skies!

Those holy men who trod these ways,
In paths of pleasantness and peace,
Whose memory we rightly praise,
Whose influence will never cease—
Well bore the burden of their day,
Working with all their might and main,
Foundations here in truth to lay,
The cause of virtue to sustain.
What care had they to leave behind,
Not lands alone, and dwellings good,
But nurture for the immortal mind,
Substantial spiritual food!
Such training children had in course,
From saintly mothers and from sires,
As told the nature and the source
Of their intense and kind desires.
Born of the Spirit from above,
And blest with teachings so divine,
It was the prompting of pure love,
To let their bright example shine.
How intimate with Heaven were they;
How conversant with sacred truth,
Which was their study day by day,
The rule of life, the guide of youth.
Happy those homes whence daily prayer,
In grateful offering arose
To Him whose tender mercies spare,
And give at night serene repose.
What favored families were theirs,
Whose parentage was so replete
With blessings for themselves and heirs,
Forth flowing from the mercy-seat.

Ancestral honors well we prize,
And social benefits no less,
From "parents passed into the skies,"
Who wrought such works of righteousness.
Preachers besides, for scores of years,
Glad tidings here of grace proclaimed,
With weary watchings, toils and tears,
Of whom we need not be ashamed.
Successive pastors reverence claim,
Who fed this flock in days of yore,
Whose record is enduring fame,
To live when time shall be no more.
One still survives, whose hoary head *
It gladdens us afresh to see,
Though most are numbered with the dead,
Who waited on his ministry.
His is the privilege to wait
A little longer on these shores,
Ere passing to that higher state,
Where is the Lamb whom he adores.
Others there are who since have stood
On Zion's walls as watchmen here,
Whose influence, however good,
It may not be their choice to hear.
These severally have sought to know
Their high commission from above,
And clearly to the people show
The riches of eternal love.
Of God — of man — of Christ — of heaven,
They taught right tenderly, and true;
The way to have our sins forgiven,

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* Rev. Eliakim Phelps, D. D.

And to begin our lives anew.
Ah, well they harmonized in this,
What every human soul must be,
To enter through the gates of bliss,
And dwell with God eternally.
Nor less do they in heart rejoice
At Zion's increase and success,
Praying with one consent and voice,
That God will still his servant bless.
This latest leader* may he crown
With glory's signal coronet,
When he shall lay his armor down,
With trophies at our Savior's feet.
Historic incidents we trace,
In scenes of joyance and of grief,
As blessings have enriched the place,
Or trials called for large relief.
Seasons of grace have been enjoyed,
In measure more than we can tell,
When God and men have been employed
In saving sinful souls from hell.
The spirit hovering around,
Has startled slumberers to think,
And made them hear the dreadful sound,
As standing on that fatal brink,
Whence fierce destruction flashes wrath,
And echoes vengeance at each breath,
Sweeping the guilty mortal's path
With warnings of eternal death!
Anon there comes a welcome voice,
Winning the trembling heart to rest,

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* Rev. Samuel Dunham.

And bids it make the happy choice,
  And be with grace and glory blest.
What looks of loveliness has He
  Who agonized for human guilt,
And hung upon that cursed tree,
  Where blood, most precious blood was spilt!
Was it for us he bled and died—
  The harmless sufferer for sin—
The Son of God thus crucified
  That we might endless glory win!
Then dearest service evermore,
  Submission sweet, and faith, and love,
Are due to Jesus o'er and o'er,
  In realms below, and realms above!
All praise to that eternal plan
  Which Sovereign Goodness saw and chose,
By which to save rebellious man,
  And reconcile malicious foes!
Strains such as these have often rung,
  From many ransomed souls forgiven,
Whose offerings of the heart and tongue,
  Have raised their incense pure to heaven.

O happy hours of praise and prayer,
  When converts from the world have come
Like little children, to declare,
  What love divine for them hath done!
Their tongues are loosed, their lips unsealed,
  Their hearts with gratitude o'erflow;
The blessedness to be revealed,
  Is such as only Christians know.
These have their sympathies expressed,
  In joys the stranger feeleth not,

Or anxiousness for souls distressed,
Once felt, not easily forgot.
Yet harvest times have often come,
Ingatherings of goodly grain,
To this our temporary home,
So recently refreshed again.
Thanks to the Lord whose loving power,
The blessing in advance has sent
To consecrate this festive hour
As one of mutual content.
Third jubilee of years—how blest!
The period we celebrate,
Is worthily the pilgrim's rest,
In prospect of a purer state.

Let not our lyre refuse a strain
Of plaintive melody the while,
Though little more of time remain
Than friendly parting with a smile.
While Providence hath largely blest
Our various residences here,
It hath not been unbroken rest,
Void of affliction, or of fear.
No—clouds have come o'er brightest skies,
And sorrow visited each heart;
Grave memories of grief arise,
In which we shared a mourner's part.
What shadows have each threshold crossed,
Where sunlight had been bright before;
What treasures have our dwellings lost,
That nought on earth can e'er restore.
Parents and children have been borne
In turn to yonder sacred spot,

Leaving more lonely ones to mourn
Sad vacancies not soon forgot.
Sisters and brothers too, how fond,
Have separated at the grave,
Not solaced with a thought beyond,
But the Redeemer's power to save.
Others more dear have gone the way
Whence no returning footsteps come;
And widowed mourners see no day
When seems it as before at home.
How many mingle thus their tears,
O'er sorrows which each heart can feel,
That e'en the silent lapse of years
Has no effective power to heal!

The youngest from the cradle dear,
How sadly is it laid aside
In that receptacle so drear,
Where many of its class abide.
Yet few the families exempt
From sorrow over children fled,
And silencing of merriment,
That such are numbered with the dead.
Forgive the strain, the gentle sigh,
Parental fondness, if you please,
That brings some moisture to the eye,
In sympathy with scenes like these.
Three little graves are side by side,
In yon inclosure near the gate,
With tablets severally supplied
To mark the name, the age, the date:
A sister and two brothers there,
Sleep peacefully beneath the sod,

In after ages to appear
  Among the risen saints of God.
Our infant offspring, why deplore,
  When suddenly removed from sight?
Faith says, "Not lost, but gone before,"
  To regions of celestial light.
Thither let us henceforth aspire,
  With purer ardor for the prize,
All cherishing devout desire
  To dwell with them above the skies.

Fraternal greetings we exchange
  With friendly spirits here at home,
Ingathered from an ample range,
  Whence various duty calls to roam.
This mother church her children dear
  Invites beneath the old rooftree,
Together thus their hearts to cheer,
  And bind in bonds of charity.
Daughters of comeliness and strength,
  Surround her here on every hand,
Whose goodly influence at length
  Extends, how widely in the land!
E'en foreign shores are sometimes trod
  By those who go far hence to teach
The lively oracles of God,
  And his incarnate love to preach.
Welcome, right welcome, all who come
  To celebrate this festal day,
Which calls a mother's children home,
  Their grateful offerings to pay.
Yes, welcome all to this repast,
  So rich in sacred memories

Well gathered from the fruitful past,
To give us plenteous supplies.
Here let the hand, the heart, the voice,
Their friendly sentiments express,
And each in other's joy rejoice,
With pure unbounded thankfulness.
Thus as the moments glide apace,
As moves the Autumn's golden sun,
No cloud shall cross our cheerful face,
Till day's delightful work is done.

What though as now no more we meet,
To take such retrospect of time—
Or gather round this sacred seat,
Where memories so sweet combine?
A larger company ere long
Will greet us on the shining shore,
And join in one triumphant song,
That there we meet to part no more!
All hail the prospect, ever bright,
Of meeting in that world above,
Where all is purity and light;
All righteousness, and peace, and love!
Still would we breathe a fervent prayer,
That those who follow in our train
May evermore most largely share
These priceless blessings that remain.
May children's children here enjoy
Rich benefits of Gospel grace,
And mightiest energies employ
To renovate and save the race.
Thus may the blest succession run,
In ages future as the past;

Nay, brighter, like the shining sun,
  Each generation till the last.
Then come with joy each golden year,
  To celebrate this jubilee,
Till nations shout the triumph here,
  Which earth has sighed so long to see!

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